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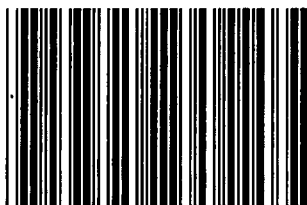
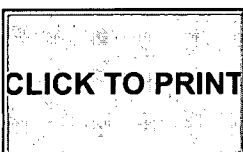
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(2) Subject* The Lee Metcalf and Spanish Peaks Wilderness Areas

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BAUCUS

STATEMENT BY SENATOR MAX BAUCUS

February 20, 1981

THE LEE METCALF AND SPANISH PEAKS WILDERNESS AREAS

Fifteen years ago, Senator Lee Metcalf wrote to the U.S. Forest Service's Region I Forester to express his support for wilderness designation of the Spanish Peaks Primitive Area. Senator Metcalf stated, "Wilderness serves the recreational, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical needs of the people. Wilderness has become a rare and precious resource in this country. Many states have little, if any, of it left. Montana is more fortunate -- and I want to assure that it will always be that way."

Throughout his renowned career of service to Montana, Senator Metcalf treasured the concept of protection of Montana's wildlands. Where possible without causing hardship to other diverse interests in our public lands, Lee Metcalf sought to preserve a portion of Montana as it was before civilization. Due in large part to his efforts, Montanans today can take pride in a living heritage of pristine lands which include the Great Bear, Absaroka-Beartooth, and Welcome Creek Wilderness Areas.

The year 1981 presents a considerably different public landscape than that which existed in 1952 when Lee Metcalf was first elected to the United States Congress. Today, we are at the conclusion of the much debated RARE I and RARE II wilderness inventory processes. The study of three of the areas mandated for special attention under the Montana Wilderness Study Act (S. 393) is also nearing completion. Simultaneously, pressures are mounting for the release of hundreds of thousands of acres of roadless forest lands to multiple use. Given this scenario and my personal assessment that vast additions to the wilderness system are unlikely in the future, I want to take this opportunity to endorse the establishment of a "Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area" within the Taylor-Hilgard study area and designation of the Spanish Peaks area for inclusion in the wilderness system.

Naming any wilderness for Senator Metcalf would, of course, be a fitting and appropriate tribute to this giant in America's conservation movement. More importantly, however, this particular designation will write the final chapter in one of the conservation efforts which Lee Metcalf advocated throughout his distinguished career. In fact, only Senator Metcalf's untimely death, January 12, 1978, was able to draw the curtain on his own efforts to designate a wilderness area in the Madison and Gallatin Ranges.

THE LEE METCALF WILDERNESS

I am supporting designation of the area generally outlined in the Forest Service's Alternative D for the Taylor-Hilgard Wilderness Study Area together with the Monument Peak area which lies adjacent to Yellowstone National Park for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. As part of a legislative package which would also include final designation of the Spanish Peaks Primitive Area as a wilderness, I am

confident this proposal represents a balanced position which is in the public interest. Furthermore, following consultations with Senator Melcher, Congressman Williams and Congressman Marlenee, I believe this is legislation which will have unified delegation support.

In essence, the "Lee Metcalf-Wilderness Area" would consist of the 157,000 acres contained in the Forest Service's Alternative D, supplemented with additional acreage in the Monument Peak Area. Together with the more than 70,000 acres in the proposed Spanish Peaks wilderness area, this represents a reasonable compromise between those who would have no wilderness and those who would have unlimited wilderness. Careful consideration must be given to specific boundaries in the drafting of this legislation. In addition, any measure will also be scrutinized by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on which Senator Melcher sits and the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee on which Congressmen Williams and Marlenee sit. Ample opportunity for necessary modifications will thus exist through amendments at the committee level as well as on the floor.

In making this proposal, I am cognizant of possible resource conflicts. Of particular concern to me is the effect which wilderness designation might have on the area's timber industry. After careful study of the data developed by the Forest Service, however, I believe that an honest appraisal of this proposal will demonstrate that relatively minimal impact on timber production of the Beaverhead and Gallatin National Forests will be experienced. Indeed, proper management of those areas selected for non-wilderness within the Taylor-Hilgard Study Area should contribute much to forest productivity in the area.

As concerns mineral production, the jury is still out on this question. Historically, the area has been of marginal value for its mineral production. As a result, I believe that recreational, wildlife, watershed and social values provide a compelling counter-balance to foregone mineral production.

THE SPANISH PEAKS

The spectacular Spanish Peaks Primitive Area is rare in two ways. First, the magnificence of this 63,000 acre section of the Madison Range is virtually unparalleled. Second, support for the permanent withdrawal of these lands from development is nearly unanimous. Indeed, following public hearings conducted in Bozeman, Montana, September 9, 1966, the Forest Service summarized public reaction as follows: "A large majority of those commenting favored an enlarged wilderness, which involves several different boundary proposals. Since there was absolutely no opposition to establishment of a wilderness, the Forest Service considered the several recommendations for making the wilderness larger."

Public support for this area has not diminished. Even those Montanans who only enjoy the view of the Spanish Peaks with its 25 peaks over 10,000 feet high have a special feeling for the protection of this resource.

In line with this sentiment, I advocate inclusion of the Spanish Peaks within our National Wilderness Preservation System. At a minimum, the 63,000 acre area currently managed as a primitive area should be expanded by about 7,000 acres as recommended by the Forest Service. In addition, other boundary adjustments should be considered where necessary to enhance and protect the wilderness values of this region.

LAND OWNERSHIP

Most frequently mentioned as a stumbling block to wilderness legislation in the Madison Range is the checkerboard ownership pattern. Dating back to the federal government's land grants to the Northern Pacific Railroad, this archaic situation prevents proper management of public and private lands. The controversy which has been generated seems endless at times. I am, therefore, inalterably committed to adjustments in land ownership patterns within the Beaverhead and Gallatin Forests. A land-exchange plan between the principal private landholder, the Burlington Northern, and the Forest Service, must be part and parcel of any wilderness legislation. Of course, common sense and the law require that any such exchange be on a value for value basis.

This is not a new position. On June 23, 1977, I testified before the House Subcommittee on Public Lands on the subject of the Montana Wilderness Study Act. On the issue of checkerboard land ownership, I requested the Subcommittee to "urge the Forest Service to move expeditiously to affect an exchange of the private lands for other national forest land." The report on the bill responded favorably to this suggestion which had been made by others as well.

Regrettably, planning efforts in the form of an environmental impact statement on a land exchange were halted by the Secretary of Agriculture on February 22, 1979 due to external factors beyond my control. In a letter to the Secretary dated May 14, 1979, I expressed my strong opposition to this action and urged immediate resumption of the study. No action was forthcoming.

The time may now be right for resumption of planning for a land exchange in the Taylor-Hilgard study area. Accordingly, I am, by letter, expressing this opinion to the U.S. Forest Service and the management of Burlington Northern with the urging that their negotiations be continued in earnest.

The most likely course available to these negotiations appears to be consolidation of Burlington Northern's holdings in the Jack Creek drainage on a value for value basis, rather than acre for acre. In exchange, the Forest Service would control the former Burlington Northern checkerboard lands held south of the Jack Creek drainage. This action would thus clear the decks for legislative action on this wilderness proposal.

While Burlington Northern is the principal property owner with some 22,000 acres in the proposed Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area, other private

landholders control more than 3,400 acres of land which must be dealt with. A plan of purchase or exchange must be settled upon which treats these parties equitably as well.

I stand ready to lend whatever assistance may be needed to bring these land exchange negotiations to a successful conclusion.

MONUMENT PEAK AREA

The Monument Peak Area presents a difficult management decision. Difficult decisions, however, provide the opportunity for innovative solutions. In this instance, the requirements of wildlife and the grizzly bear, in particular, conflict with other resource management objectives.

The arguments which have been advanced by scientists actively involved in grizzly bear research in this area are compelling. The proximity of the Monument Peak Area to Yellowstone National Park and its native grizzly bear population convince me that this prime habitat must be protected. This, in essence, suggests the need for open space and solitude.

Wilderness designation would provide one mechanism for protecting wildlife values. However, in light of other resource demands, I am not advocating wilderness status for the entire area. Instead, I support the establishment of a wilderness area surrounding Monument Peak and adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. This designation would have very limited effect on areas with recreational, timber and mineral potential. By the same token, critical habitat for the threatened grizzly bear would be undisturbed.

SNOWMOBILING

Public comment presented at hearings conducted by the Forest Service on the environmental impact statement for the Taylor-Hilgard area and my own experience indicate that snowmobiling is an increasingly popular method of enjoying many areas of the Madison Range. In light of the area's sluggish winter-time economy, snowmobiling also contributes to the health of the tourism industry.

Fortunately, most snowmobiling appears to be concentrated along what has been informally labeled the "Big Sky Snowmobile Trail." Under the outline of this proposal, snowmobiling can generally continue in an uninterrupted fashion. In light of the proposed wildlife priority for the Monument Peak Area, some restrictions may be necessary in this area and where otherwise necessary, for resource protection. Given the continued cooperation of snowmobile users, these restrictions should be minimal, however.

RELEASE LANGUAGE

As a result of the wilderness studies which have been and are being conducted in Montana, several million acres of forest lands have been withdrawn from the resource production base of our national forests. Of these lands, a great deal of acreage simply has little potential for inclusion in the wilderness system. This territory should be released from wilderness study.

Accordingly, I support inclusion of language in this legislation which would release specific roadless areas by recognizing the sufficiency of the wilderness inventory. This release language reflects the necessity of finalizing the study of and planning for our national forests. In addition, it responds to the importance of maintaining a healthy timber industry for Montana's economy.

The specifics of this "release language" will require further study to identify an appropriate approach. This will require consultation with the public, industry groups, conservationists, and the Forest Service.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to set forth a plan of action for legislation to establish wilderness areas in the Madison Range of Montana. I do not intend that it should be considered a rigid position. On the contrary, I recognize that flexibility will be needed throughout the legislative process. I would, as a result, welcome any suggestions which this statement may generate.